

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 246**  
***An Act Establishing a Loan Forgiveness Program for Historically Underrepresented Students Pursuing Careers in Nursing***

**By Leo Canty**

**Public Health Committee Public Hearing**  
**Fri., Feb. 29, 2008**

My name is Leo Canty and I am submitting written testimony in support of Senate Bill 246, *An Act Establishing a Loan Forgiveness Program for Historically Underrepresented Students Pursuing Careers in Nursing*.

The lack of diversity in Connecticut's health care workforce has a substantial, negative impact on the level of trust and the quality of care in racial and ethnic communities. While it is difficult to gather racial and ethnic information about Connecticut's nursing workforce, the National Black Nurses Association reports that only 4.9 percent of all registered nurses in the U.S. are African American.

Research illustrates that health care workers from historically underrepresented populations are more likely to treat patients of racial and ethnic communities, which improves access to health care. In addition, these patients are more satisfied with the care they receive from historically underrepresented health professionals. National studies also demonstrate that a trusting relationship between patient and provider improves the accuracy of diagnoses, increases patient adherence to recommended treatment, and enhances patient satisfaction.

One of the best places to start expanding the racial and ethnic diversity of Connecticut's nursing workforce is through our higher education system. While racial and ethnic minorities constitute the largest untapped reservoir of future health care providers, progress toward increasing the diversity of students who pursue careers in nursing has been slow for several reasons.

Over the past 30 years, sources of grant aid have steadily declined. Pell Grants covered 84 percent of the costs of a four-year public college in 1976, but only 39 percent in 2000. At the same time, higher education has increased the number grant awards based on merit, rather than need. For example, private college and university grants for middle-income students have exceeded grants for low-income students, according to a 2004 Institute of Medicine of the National Academies report.

An active loan forgiveness program can encourage many more students from historically underrepresented communities to pursue nursing careers, which also will alleviate Connecticut's nursing shortage. In 2004 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that health care facilities will need more than 1.2 million registered nurses by 2014 to accommodate baby boomers' increasing needs and replace retiring nurses.

I urge the Committee to pass S.B. 246 and establish a loan forgiveness program that will diversify our nursing workforce, improve the level of trust and the quality of care in racial and ethnic communities, and help alleviate Connecticut's nursing shortage.

Thank you.